

A guide to...

Volunteering

**for anyone becoming
(or interested in becoming)
a volunteer**



**Prepared by Volunteering Central West (VCW),
a project of**

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in contributing to the community through volunteering.

Volunteers are vital to the provision of many important services which contribute to improving the overall wellbeing of the community for it's members.

The following guide provides general information to introduce you to the experience of volunteering.

We hope you find this guide useful for informing your decision to volunteer. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Volunteering Central West team on 02 6332 4866.

Wishing you many fulfilling volunteering adventures,

The Volunteering Team

Volunteering Central West &



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WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING?

Formal volunteering is more than simply doing something for nothing. Formal volunteering is a service or activity which is performed in not for profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion
- for no financial payment, and
- in designated volunteer positions only.

(www.volunteeringaustralia.org, 2009)



THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering has a meaningful, positive impact on your community but the benefits to you as the volunteer can be just as valuable.

They can include:

- **Maintaining an active involvement in your community**

Individuals in a community co-depend on one another for survival and growth so volunteering your time and skills in your community is as good for your own wellbeing as it is for the community's.

- **Developing and maintaining skills**

- **Building and expanding career options**

Volunteering experience stands out on a CV and can improve your employability. It can also be a good way to enhance your professional skill base or allow you to explore new career fields.

- **Exploring new interests and hobbies**

- **Expanding your life experience and world view**

- **Personal fulfilment, fun or to gain a sense of belonging**

- **Contributing to a cause you support**

- **Sending a signal to friends, family, co-workers, etc**

Your volunteering reflects a more complete picture of yourself by demonstrating your commitment, dedication and interests. Lead by example and inspire!

- **Developing diverse social links**

- **Increasing confidence**

- **Learning more about your community**

THE PRINCIPLES OF VOLUNTEERING

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- Volunteer work is unpaid
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice
- Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances
- Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community
- Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the not for profit sector only
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality.

(www.volunteeringaustralia.org, 2009)

THE PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

The following example illustrates the principles of volunteering at work, and shows how they can help differentiate volunteering from other activities.

Washing the dishes - volunteering, or something else?

At home: when I wash the dishes after dinner I am doing the housework (I am keeping my dishes clean so I can use them at my next meal).

Informal volunteering: when I wash the dishes for my neighbour because he has a broken wrist I am being a good neighbour (this man is my friend and I am helping out because I want to express my friendship in the knowledge that he would help me if the situation arose).

Formal volunteering: when I go to a not-for-profit organisation and apply to help out in their soup kitchen, and one of my duties is to wash dishes, then I am a volunteer. I have chosen freely to volunteer. I am not being paid for my work. I am motivated to perform the duties of this volunteer role because I believe that my unpaid labour benefits the community.

Community work experience: when my university/TAFE/school/job network provider requires that I perform work as a volunteer as part of their requirements, and my task is to wash dishes at a local hostel for homeless people, this is work experience (my main motivation is to meet their requirements).

Community service: when I commit an act of vandalism and a magistrate orders me to make reparation by washing dishes at a local community centre then I am on a community service order (I don't want to wash dishes even though I think the community centre does good work).

Work and development order (WDO): when I have unpaid fines with the SDRO and I am eligible to undertake unpaid work in the form of washing dishes at a soup kitchen in order to pay the fines off then I am on a work and development order.

TYPES OF VOLUNTEERING

The types of volunteering opportunities available in your community may surprise you as they can be many and varied. Opportunities available could include...

- ◆ **Corporate**
E.g. administration, clerical, computer data entry, corporate volunteering through your workplace
- ◆ **Aged care**
E.g. visiting the elderly in their home or aged care facility
- ◆ **Aboriginal communities**
E.g. educational mentoring, skilled volunteering in Aboriginal communities, campaigning for aboriginal issues
- ◆ **Animal welfare**
E.g. caring for sick or injured animals, protection of native species
- ◆ **Parents and carers**
E.g. school canteen, reading groups, coaching
- ◆ **Health**
E.g. patient support, public speaking to raise awareness of health issues
- ◆ **Education**
E.g. ethics teaching, reading groups, technology tutoring
- ◆ **Disabilities**
E.g. respite for carers, special assistance
- ◆ **Fundraising**
E.g. assisting or planning fundraising events for organisations
- ◆ **Community and welfare**
E.g. charity shop assistant, community driving,

school canteen assistant, food service for the homeless and underprivileged

◆ **Arts, culture and heritage**

E.g. museum, gallery or historical guide or tour leader, library assistant, performing arts groups

◆ **Women's services**

E.g. assist in a refuge, advocate for women's rights and equality, CWA, business mentoring, rural networking

◆ **Men's services**

E.g. helping out at a Men's Shed

◆ **Children and young people**

E.g. mentoring, education support in schools

◆ **Police and emergency services**

E.g. State Emergency Services, Rural Fire Service, St John's Ambulance, Red Cross, Rescue Association, VIPs

◆ **Sport and recreation**

E.g. coaching a local sporting team, committee membership

◆ **Environment and conservation**

E.g. tree planting and gardening in your local area

◆ **Multicultural**

E.g. migrant support, international friendship groups, conversation groups for language development

◆ **Special events**

E.g. catering, setting up, etc. for community events

TIME COMMITMENT OPTIONS

The length of time that you would like to volunteer for can also be flexible. There can be short-term, long-term or one-off volunteering opportunities for you to be a part of in your community.

VOLUNTEER RIGHTS

Volunteering Australia is the National peak body for volunteering and they promote the following basic rights for volunteers.

As a volunteer you have the right:

- to work in a healthy and safe environment as per the WHS requirements applicable to your workplace
- to be treated in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation
- to be adequately covered by insurance
- to be given accurate and truthful information about the organisation you are working for
- to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses
- to be given a copy of the organisation's volunteer policy and any other policy that affects your work
- not to fill a position previously held by a paid worker
- not to do the work of paid staff during industrial disputes
- to have a job description and agreed working hours
- to have access to a grievance procedure
- to be provided with orientation to the organisation
- to have your confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988, and
- to be provided with sufficient training to do your job

To help protect these rights, Volunteering Australia developed the *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations*.

VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

All volunteers have a general responsibility to:

- Make an informed decision to work as a volunteer with an organisation
- Be willing to undertake work orientation and training as required
- Work within the duty statement on tasks suitable to their skills and experience
- Behave in an ethical manner
- Keep agency and client matters confidential
- Be committed to the agency's aims and objectives
- To be reliable and punctual, and to inform appropriate people within the organisation when unable to attend or complete a task
- Use appropriate information channels within an agency when needing information, support, back-up, supervision or review
- Be aware of the limits of their role within the agency
- Be aware of their duty of care
- Be aware of workplace health and safety policies and practices
- Work as a member of the team
- Be aware of protocol when representing the agency
- Commit to achieving results and make an effective contribution to the agency
- Treat clients and fellow workers with dignity and respect

Also, you will have responsibilities specific to the organisation you volunteer for and the role you undertake - **BE SURE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR OBLIGATIONS WHEN YOU SIGN UP.**

If you have chosen to volunteer as part of another agreement such as with Centrelink, a WDO, course or internship, be sure that you are aware of and understand the requirements of these.

HOW TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER

When you decide that you would like to become a volunteer, there are a number of ways in which to do so. You can:

1. **Contact Volunteering Central West (VCW)** to register your interest and discuss your options. Our contact details are on the back of this guide.

OR

2. **Check out the Go Volunteer website** for volunteer opportunities in your area (www.govolunteer.com.au). Please don't be deterred if you can't find suitable opportunities as not all available volunteer positions are necessarily advertised on this site. Contact us at VCW if this is the case.

OR

3. If you know of an organisation that you are interested in volunteering with, contact the organisation directly.

WHAT TO EXPECT

As a matter of course when becoming a volunteer you may go through some or all of the following processes, depending on the particular organisation and the role you are undertaking:

- **One or more interviews** to discuss your interests and abilities and match you to suitable volunteer roles.
- **Volunteer Screening**

In some cases organisations will screen staff and volunteers in order to:

◇ **PROTECT SERVICE USERS**

Laws and ethics require organisations to ensure that the individuals who utilise their services are protected from abuse or harm.

◇ **SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS**

In the case of a complaint or questionable incident that calls a volunteer's behaviour in to question, recorded screening clearance can vouch on their behalf.

◇ **PROTECT ORGANISATIONS**

Organisation can be subject to mandatory obligations to screen staff and volunteers due to the nature of the services they provide.

Types of Screening

The level of risk and responsibility attached to a position will determine the forms of screening undertaken and can include:

- ⇒ Driving record check
- ⇒ Reference check
- ⇒ Working with children check
- ⇒ Criminal record check
- ⇒ Medical history check

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WHAT TO EXPECT (continued)

- **Orientation and Induction**

Your orientation and induction to any organisation should cover:

- ◇ Introductions to staff, in particular your direct supervisor
- ◇ Orientation to the workplace and organisation
- ◇ Work health and safety training and requirements including, but not limited to, emergency exits and alarms, fire extinguishers, first aid, first aid supplies and accident reporting
- ◇ Access to all policies relating to volunteers and volunteer roles
- ◇ Reading and signing of volunteer documentation including a volunteer agreement, job description, code of conduct and complaints procedure
- ◇ Sufficient training for a volunteer to be able to carry out their role competently and safely
- ◇ Opportunities for questions and planning for role reviews

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before joining an organisation as a volunteer, there are some important things you should be sure of. Check that:

- the organisation is not-for-profit
- the purpose of the organisation matches your own values and beliefs
- the organisation has volunteer insurance
- your role is clear and specific
- you will be provided with sufficient training to perform your duties
- you are satisfied with the level of training you receive in relation to work health and safety
- the organisation can provide you with written information about its purpose and activities, and
- you are satisfied that the funds of the organisation are expended in accordance with its mission

You might also like to ask:

- If the organisation is signed up to the NSW Government's *Statement of Principles for the Recognition of Volunteers*.

As a prospective volunteer, this will be a signal to you that the organisation upholds principles of care, respect and dignity for both their paid and un-paid workers.

View the principles in full at www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au.





Prepared by Volunteering Central West (VCW), a project of The Neighbourhood Centre *Bathurst*

June 2014

To request further copies please contact Volunteering Central West at The Neighbourhood Centre *Bathurst*:

phone 02 6332 4866

fax 02 6332 1244

email vmp@binc.org.au / binc@binc.org.au

Acknowledgements

Volunteering Central West receives funding from the Australian Government Department of Social Services and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services

Sources

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Volunteering Central West

An information and support service for volunteer involving organisations across Central Western NSW.

We can provide assistance to any not-for-profit, community-based organisations in areas such as:

**Volunteer Management—Recruitment and Referral
Promotion—Networking—Volunteer Training**

location **The Neighbourhood Centre *Bathurst***

96 Russell Street

Bathurst

NSW 2795

phone **02 6332 4866**

fax **02 6332 1244**

email **vmp@binc.org.au**

web **www.binc.org.au**

post **PO Box 1469, Bathurst, NSW 2795**